



Fla. County Wants to Finance Drug Treatment Through Alcohol Tax

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News Summary

Polk County, Fla.'s County Commission will ask state legislators to allow it to seek a 1 percent tax on retail alcohol sales to pay for substance abuse treatment and related services.

[News Chief](#) reported Dec. 16 that the Polk County Commission is modeling its effort after an initiative in Miami-Dade County, where commissioners won legislative approval to pursue a local option food and beverage tax to finance services for the homeless, including drug and alcohol treatment. Polk County would like an alcohol tax to fund substance use treatment services for all residents in need.

If the state Legislature approves the county's request in 2011, the county then would establish a service provider task force and would seek voter approval for the tax.

A County Commission resolution that passed on Dec. 15 states that Polk County lacks treatment programs as well as facilities to provide education, training and vocational support services for individuals with substance use problems.

County Attorney Michael Craig indicated that if a referendum were to pass, the county might consider a public-private partnership to establish and operate the needed services.

From the Polk County News Chief:

County Commission seeks alcohol tax to fight addiction

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BARTOW - County commissioners have agreed that alcohol should carry a one-percent tax to pay for addiction treatment services.

Now it will be up to the Florida Legislature to act on the request.

It is one of several items the County Commission hopes to bring to legislators this January.

The Polk County Commission unanimously passed a resolution passed unanimously on Wednesday, stating that Polk County needs additional funding sources to provide counseling, alcohol and drug abuse treatment.

The funding could help provide or secure employment, as well as training, education, housing, and facilities to provide these services -- if voters approve of the measure.

The Florida Legislature, through adoption of Florida Statute Section 212.0306, previously authorized Miami-Dade County to levy a local option food and beverage tax to provide part of the funding for programs to address the needs of the homeless, including alcohol and drug abuse treatment.

According to the resolution, Polk County lacks treatment programs and facilities to provide these services. A local option tax on the retail sale of alcoholic beverages could provide that funding.

That statute specifically refers to Miami-Dade County providing services to the homeless. Lea Ann Thomas, Assistant County Manager, said Polk County would need a statute referring to Polk County, and allowing the funds to provide for all who need them, not just the homeless.

Thomas said that the next step will be to take the resolution to the Polk County Legislative Delegation on Jan. 6, 2011, and ask them to bring it to the Legislature as a bill.

If a bill is enacted, the County Commission would need to set up the referendum, and pass a local ordinance to set up a service provider task force, Thomas said.

That policy board would oversee the allocation of funds, if the referendum passes, Commissioner Bob English said.

"I think this is a great initiative for Polk County," Commissioner Melony Bell said. "My concern is if this will always be set in stone or can we be flexible?"

English said the task force would be in charge of making adjustments, as needed.

County Attorney Michael Craig said there has been no decision made yet as to who will manage the program. Getting the request in front of the electors is the next step, he said.

He also suggested that the county may look at a public and private partnership arrangement, similar to the many local government agencies and non-profit organizations that run the county's juvenile boot camp.

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